THE OFFICE OF THE DEACON

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EDWARD MACK, D. D.

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THE
OFFICE OF THE DEACON

An Interpretation of Chapter IV, Section IV, of the form of Government, Revised, and adopted by the General Assembly in 1922.

By

EDWARD MACK, D. D.

Revised 1929

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REVISED SECTION OF
BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER
Minutes of the General Assembly, 1922
Chapter IV, Section IV, of the Deacon

46-I. The office of Deacon is set forth in the Scriptures as ordinary and perpetual in the Church. The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need.

47-II. It is the duty of the Deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the consent of the congregation. In the discharge of their duties the Deacons are under the supervision and authority of the session. In a church in which it is impossible for any reason to secure Deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the Ruling Elders.

48-III. To the office of Deacon, which is spiritual in nature, should be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.

49-IV. The Deacons of a particular church shall be organized as a Board, of which the pastor shall be an advisory member. The Board shall elect a

Chairman, a Secretary, and a Treasurer, to whom shall be entrusted the funds for the current expenses of the Church. It shall meet at least once a quarter, and whenever requested by the Session. The Board of each church shall determine the number necessary for a quorum.

The Board shall keep a record of its proceedings, and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its minutes to the Session once every six months, and at other times upon request of the Session.

It is desirable that the Session and the Board of Deacons meet in joint session once a quarter to confer on the matters of common interest.

50-V. Deacons may properly be appointed by the Higher Courts to serve on committees, especially as Treasurers. It is suitable also that they be appointed Trustees of any funds held by any of the Church Courts. It may also be helpful for the Church Courts when devising plans of church finance, to invite wi and consecrated Deacons to their counsels.

51-VI. The Deacons may, with much advantage, hc conferences from time to time for the discussion the interests committed to them. Such conference may include representatives of churches covering areas of smaller or larger extent. Any actions taken by these conferences shall have only an advisory character.

51-VI-a. It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly women of the congregation to assist the Deacons in ministering to the sick, to widows, to orphans, to prisoners, and to others who may be in any distress or need. They may also aid the Deacons in collecting and distributing the offerings of the people.

CHAPTER I.

Historical Explanation

In the Presbyterian Church in the United States, since its separate organization in 1861, there has existed an office which has varied widely in its duties and uses in the local churches. This is the Office of the Deacon. These wide variations, misuses, and even abuses, may be attributed in large measure to the vagueness of its constitution, as outlined in our former unrevised Form of Government. Its warrant for existence and service was oftener "may" than "shall." The dissatisfaction and agitation of recent years have produced more definite outline and more scriptural alignment.

This former uncertain and varying conception of an office, which should have been distinct in outline and purpose, was our heritage from the past. Early and modern prelatical churches, confusing the Scriptural teachings, changed the office into a subordinate degree of a graded ministry. In this conception the Deacon was a probationer, or apprentice, on the way to eldership or priesthood.

In some non-conformist churches the Deacon was displaced, or obscured, by the Trustee, in the administration of the "temporalities" of the Church in States where a free church still owed certain temporal and corporate obligations to the civil government.

In our own Church both theory and practice have varied, some congregations committing all temporal matters to Elders; others committing them to Trustees; others assigning to the Deacons a very narrow service as occasional almoners to the limited number of very poor in the local congregation; and yet others committing the entire administration of church support and benevolences to the Deacon, under the supervision, of course, of the Session. The practice of the Church has varied indefinitely between these extremes, with increasing partiality for the last.

This diversity necessarily caused confusion, resulting in the obscuring, if not degrading, of an important and clearly warranted New Testament office. Some years of discussion ended in appointment by the General Assembly of an ad-interim committee, which after years of thorough study and well-balanced counsel presented to the General Assembly of 1921, meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, a Scriptural, reasonable and definite plan of the Office of the Deacon. The report of this committee was adopted substantially by that Assembly, and sent to the presbyteries for their action. With the approval of an overwhelming number of the presbyteries, the General Assembly of 1922, meeting in Charleston, W. Va., enacted this plan as the organic law of the church, substituting it for Chapter IV, Sec-

tion IV, of the Form of Government. So, uncertainty and confusing diversity in the practice of the church have made way for a definite and effective plan for all of our congregations.

We must bear in mind, however, that this is not the introduction of a new office, nor even a new conception of the office of Deacon. It is in reality the ratification of a conception and usage long existent in many of our best organized and most active churches, and found by them to be the best means for conducting the temporal and benevolent activities of the church. This may be proven by reference to various publications within the church, among which should be mentioned particularly the "Minutes of the Deacons' Convention of the Synod of Missouri, 1890," containing a conclusive argument and appeal by the late Dr. E. C. Gordon for a worthier conception and a larger use of the Diaconate. I owe, as do many others, my earliest and most decisive impressions of this subject to his thorough discussion.

In a word, the new plan is distinctively Scriptural, as we shall see further on in the discussion, and rescues this New Testament office both from the perversions of prelacy and from the narrowness of a merely eleëmosynary conception, at the same time restoring it to its New Testament warrant and usage.

CHAPTER II.

Reasons for the Adoption of the New Plan

A crisis in the New Testament Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turned the minds of Apostles and of the entire body of believers to the institution of the office of Deacon (Acts vi). A similar development has been evidently operative in our own church in recent years. The increasing membership of churches, especially in cities and towns, with the insistent exactions of the age on the time and strength of busy men, made necessary the use of other agencies than the Session for the administration of church finance and benevolence. Naturally such churches remembered and returned to the agency recorded in the inspired Scriptures, until in nearly all of our large churches the office of the Deacon had been magnified, according to the Scriptures, and in view of the option, "may," offered in the old chapter of the Form of Government.

The action of the General Assembly of 1921, then, was, in a sense, the ratification of a prevailing and recognized usage. The use of a Board of Trustees for such purposes had never gained footing in the South-

ern Presbyterian churches, while, as has been said, a large majority of sessions had already committed these duties to the Board of Deacons. The Assembly was not forcing an innovation, but was following the guidance and witness of the Spirit in the churches.

Other developments were leading in the same direction. "Laymen's" movements, thorough organization of the benevolences of the Church directed by the Committee of Stewardship, the Progressive Program, Educational Campaigns, and other similar spiritual advances, made imperative the consecration of members, other than the Session, to the enlarging benevolent and missionary work of the Church while the elders "gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word."

We have, therefore, the assurance that the restoration and magnifying of the Office of the Deacon was not a forethought of the General Assembly, but a natural response to the pressure of an accomplished fact. It is unmistakable and suggestive that the revision of our organic law on this point has been coincident with one of the greatest revivals in our Church, the revival of its missionary and benevolent work. The restored diaconate is a part of the enthusiastic and deeply spiritual forward-movement of our Church.

CHAPTER III.

The Scripture Warrant and Emphasis

"The office of the Deacon *is set forth in the Scriptures* as ordinary and perpetual in the Church. The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need."—*Form of Government, Section IV, Parag. 46.*

These are the initial words of the new chapter on the office of the Deacon. They declare that the office is not a human or ecclesiastical development, but is founded on the Scripture. It is necessary, now, that we follow their lead and turn to the New Testament for the fact of the office, and for such details as it may provide. We must remember that the New Testament was written to meet, first, the needs of its own time, and that much was of necessity left to the mutual understanding of the facts concerned and to the Spirit's guidance. So, while great principles and certain intent are unmistakable, the multitude of details must be omitted. It has been left for us, in a measure, with the guidance of the Spirit, and with sanctified common sense, to bring the details into loyal and harmonious relation to the clear principle and purpose.

These opening words of the New Section of our Form of Government claim for the office in general, and for the particulars of the administration of the office, as outlined and authorized in the following paragraphs, that they are "set forth in the Scriptures." Let us search the Scriptures if these things be so.

While in fact the word "deacon" occurs only five times (Phil. i, 1; 1 Tim. iii, 8, 10, 12, 13) in the English translation of the New Testament, the Greek word, which it renders, and the related nouns and verbs occur with striking frequency; in fact, considerably more than a hundred times. This teaches us that the idea of service, involved in the office of the Deacon, is of constant occurrence in the New Testament. Space and time permit that only some of the characteristic occurrences of these words, when *not* translated "deacon," claim our consideration.

The Greek word *diakoneô*, "to serve," might be rendered as well to "deaconize," or to "deacon;" and will be so rendered in the following quotations from the New Testament, in order to show the manner and force of its use. The noun *diakonos*, "servant" or "deacon," is a kindred form of the present active participle, "one who serves," or "one who deacons." The noun *diakonia*, signifying "service," or "assistance," is of frequent occurrence, being used twice in Acts vi, 1-6.

Of our Lord we read in His own words (in Mark x, 45), "for even the Son of Man came not to be *deaconed* to, but to be a *deacon*." He said again to His disciples (Luke xxii, 27)," I am among you as one that *deaconeth*." It is in such passages as these that the deacon finds the highest meaning of his office. It is not a mere matter of finance, of temporalities, of filthy lucre, but of partnership in spiritual service with the blessed First and Senior Deacon. In virtue of this association no deacon may hold low and material views of so spiritual a service, which filled the hands and heart of the great Son of God.

Of the Bethany Mary her sister Martha said (Luke x, 45) : "My sister hath left me to *deacon* alone." Martha was worried about the deaconing, of dishes, while Mary was intent on a higher *deaconing*, hearing unfolded the ministry and mystery of Calvary, against the coming of which she began from that day to lay up all her living.

In the Acts of the Apostles are found such phrases as the following: Chapter vi, "that they may take part of this *deaconing*," spoken of the ordination of the original seven deacons; and xii, 25, "when they had fulfilled their *deaconing*," describing the completion of the mission of Paul and his comrades to Jerusalem, bearing the gifts of the Gentile churches to the needy Jewish brethren.

Peter wrote thus: "If any man *deacon*, let him do it of the strength which God supplieth." (1 Peter iv, 11.)

In Paul's epistles frequent use is made of the word with evident reference to the spirit and function of the office. Of Onesimus he wrote to Philemon: "He might have *deaconed* unto me." In Romans xii, among the duties particularly within the circle of believers, we read: "*Deaconing*, let us give ourselves to our *deaconing*." Characteristically and appropriately he wrote (2 Cor. ix, 1) of the collection for the poor of Jerusalem, "touching the *deaconing* to the saints."

In other epistles of Paul are such uses of the word as the following: "take heed to thy *deaconing*" (Col. iv, 17); "putting me into the *deaconing*" (1 Tim. i, 12); "make full proof of thy *deaconing*" (2 Tim. iv, 5); "Mark is useful to me for *deaconing*" (2 Tim. iv, 11); "Timothy, our brother, and *deacon* of God" (1 Thess. iii, 2); "Phoebe, our sister, who is a *deacon*" (Rom. xvi, 1). In the last passage the word is not in the feminine form, but in the masculine, or generic form, as comprehensive and descriptive of the spirit and service of those who are deacons.

The two passages of Scripture, in which the office itself is most clearly set forth, as to its origin, characteristics and duties, are Acts vi and 1 Tim. iii, and they require

special study. We shall consider them in reverse order.

1. *1 Timothy iii, 8-13.* Assuming for the present that Paul is writing to Timothy of the two offices already established and well known in the Church, in this chapter we find the qualifications and duties of these two ordinary offices clearly outlined and enjoined. The "bishops," verses 1-7, as many other passages of Scripture indicate, are identical with presbyters or elders. After writing of them, the Apostle instructs Timothy concerning those who are to be ordained as deacons in the Church. We cannot fail to observe that the spiritual and moral qualifications are much the same as those enjoined on the elders, or bishops, such as sobermindedness, reliability, temperance, freedom from avarice, monogamy, godly homes, and spiritual life. For elders aptness to teach is a necessity; while for deacons service or ministration, is emphasized, as the word itself indicates.

It is evident from this passage that Paul recognized two offices in the Christian Church, and considered it of first importance that Timothy find and ordain fit men for each office. Of this there is no question in our Church, or in those like to us in faith and order.

2. *Acts vi.* We must turn, now, to the second passage, which, in recording the origin and institution of the office of Deacon, sets forth clearly its purpose and duties.

The membership of the early Church had increased rapidly, three thousand being added at one time, five thousand at another, with other daily accessions. This marvelous growth overtaxed, and almost overwhelmed, its simple provisions for organization and administration. The multiplying and diversifying obligations of leadership and administration, devolving up to this time upon the Apostles, had become so exacting, that after performing the necessary temporal functions of leadership, no time was left to them for the fundamental and more highly spiritual duties laid upon them by Christ. Under such pressure some parts of the temporal administration were in danger of neglect or omission, as may have occurred in the care of the poor believers of Greek extraction.

In this crisis appeal was made to the Holy Spirit, given by Christ to be their guide; and He led them to a happy solution of the problem, for themselves and for all ages of the Church. The body of believers was directed to choose from among themselves seven men of faith and piety, filled with the Holy Spirit, whom the Apostles then by laying on of hands "set over this business" or "daily *deaconing*," the first time this word is applied to this definite office, or body of men.

We have no means of knowing just how this electing or choosing of the Seven was conducted. It was certainly done in prayer. It may have been done very much as dea-

cons are elected in our congregations today. Most assuredly it was done in a wise and effective way.

It is impossible to think that these were merely able men of business, entrusted with the secular, or financial affairs of the Church. The emphasis is placed at another point: they were men of spiritual life, "filled with the Holy Spirit." And at least two of them, Stephen and Philip, became evangelists, and mighty preachers of the Word.

Nor does the passage allow us to think on the other hand, that their ministry was limited to the relief of the poor saints, because this happened to be the immediate occasion of their appointment.

The words of the passage are clear. Their full meaning is to be found in the quite positive words of exclusion and contrast, by which the two offices of Apostle and Deacon were now distinguished from each other, with clearly defined functions. Said the Apostles: "We shall set the seven over this matter, while we give ourselves *wholly* to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." Direct and clear exegesis assigns to the Deacon, those duties which are exclusive of the primary obligations of Apostles, or Elders, that is "prayer and the ministry of the Word." Not that either might not have the characteristics and some of the obligations of the other office; but each had a distinct duty, and was par-

ticularly responsible for his own Divinely-given office. Elders had performed the duties of Deacon before there was a Diaconate (Acts i, 17-25). And they might perform them afterwards. But the Spirit had shown a wiser and more effective way. Peter and Paul still might "deacon," while Stephen and Philip might "preach the Word." But notwithstanding the exceptions to the rule, the distinction was clearly made in this decisive passage.

So it will be seen that the very exact words of this chapter, recording the institution of the office, refute the narrower conception of the Deacon as a mere collector and disburser of alms to the needy in any particular congregation, and warrant strongly the larger interpretation now placed upon this New Testament office by the almost unanimous accord of our Church.

From our review of all of these passages of Scripture the following deductions can be made without controversy:

(1) The words, *diakonos*, "a deacon," and *diakoneo*, "to deacon," were originally descriptive of a part of the work of our Lord, and of some phases of the apostolic service. They pointed to the benevolent, gracious and unselfish ministry of those who loved, and lived to lift up, their unfortunate brethren. And so the obligations and opportunities of the Deacon's office came from that wide field of Divine and human loving-kindnesses, which are ever needed, and which never fail.

(2) The words set forth the loving spirit and purpose of *all* believers in the discharge of Gospel obligations of service. The function is really that of all Christians. Every believer is essentially a deacon. Differentiation into a group of office-bearers was only for the sake of certain and orderly administration. As in reality, "apostle" and "elder" are words originally having wider than official meaning, just so the word "deacon" represented a Gospel privilege larger than the mission of a small group of officers. It sets forth the duty of every believer. **The office of the Deacon is the organizing and administering of a general service under a specific and effective leadership.** The Deacons are not all who serve, but they should be the leaders, organizers and inspirers of those who serve.

(3) So it was the word "deacon" came to describe a definite, spiritual office in the Church, as definite as that of apostle or elder, and as spiritual in its field of service.

(4) Paul's letters show that already in the Apostolic age distinct and important duties were committed to the Deacon, differing in detail and form from those of elder and apostle, but spiritual duties none the less, and entrusted to men of spiritual life. They might have to do in detail with the physical and temporal needs of believers and churches, but they were truly spiritual duties. Our notions of distinction between "spiritual" and "temporal"

are often too unworthy and untrue. Use for Christ may bring to pass that nothing be "called common or unclean." The Gospel conception and administration of such duties are vital to the higher spiritual work of the Church. The New Testament conception of the office of the Deacon is not secular nor material. Only spiritual Gospel men could properly administer the office. The application of this New Testament principle is needed today in the beneficent activities of our Church. For this work, too, like that of "the bowls before the altar," is holy unto the Lord, and its spiritual administration is vital to the spiritual life and progress of our Church. Too long has persisted the low view of the Christian Church, maintaining a sharp distinction between its spiritual affairs and its secular affairs, and holding that the latter may be committed to the direction of unconverted but approved men, if they be able administrators. Such a notion is far beneath the high conception of the Scriptures. It is a menace to the Gospel view of benevolence, which would bring even the kingdom of finance into subjection to the spiritual, everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(5) The office of the Deacon holds out to its faithful members the promise of a "good degree," 1 Tim. iii, 13. This does not mean necessarily that they will be promoted to bishopric or eldership; but rather that they will win the Lord's approval, and have joy

in doing His will in their station in His great kingdom. Faithful and efficient deacons may not prove to be good elders, nor would an efficient elder always make a good deacon. Both offices are concerned with spiritual service, but service differing in detail, in which each has its own peculiar fitness, and its own call and commission from Christ. To the true deacon, as to the true elder, "the good degree" man mean:

"Well done, good and faithful servant,
Thou hast been faithful in a few things;
I will make thee ruler over many things.
Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

The words of this chapter have been written with the conscious risk of repetition, in order to make clear the point of emphasis. That point is presented once more, and as follows: *The Deacon is a spiritual officer no less than the Elder.* Both need the Divine guidance and power. There are differences of administration, but the same Spirit. The Deacon is not young material to be developed for the Eldership. Older men may be better Deacons, and younger men better Elders; a point which often escapes the notice of our congregations. The Deacon represents and challenges in his spiritual life and service the consecration of our life and possessions to Jesus Christ. Therefore our Church is magnifying this office today.

CHAPTER IV.

The Duties of the Deacon

"It is the duty of the Deacons."—Form of Government, Sect. IV. Parag. 47.

(1) "To minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress."

These words set forth the Deacon's first and most evident service, approaching nearest to the emergency which made necessary the first Board of Deacons. Some, on the supposition that we cannot go beyond an explicit command of Scripture, would limit the office to such ministrations. And this is an important and a holy work. But even this restricted view should go beyond the ordinary practice of those who hold it. The Deacon's opportunity in this regard reaches beyond the few poor saints in his own church to far wider service for the distressed of the whole community and of the world. Here is his opportunity to "go about doing good," as did Christ, the First Deacon, and to witness for Christ in a modern miracle of loving-kindness. Lodges and fraternities have come near to robbing the Deacon of his rightful functions, at the same time stealing from his Church her

bright crown. The Church is better equipped and more directly commissioned for this duty than any "Associated Charities," no matter how highly we may esteem the unselfish labors of such organizations. Ordinarily, in practice, only the distressed in the membership of the local church are eligible to the help of the "Deacons' Fund." There was once a large church in which were five deacons, and, likewise, five needy widows. The one sole duty of these five deacons was to receive the collection at the Quarterly Communion, divide it into five shares, and distribute it by the hand of each one of the deacons to each one of the widows, a deacon and a widow. This was a living, real, although unconscious caricature of the New Testament office. How the Deacon may magnify his office! Through his ministry the whole community may know that there is a sympathizing Christ. Beyond this, the expatriate Armenian, the starving Chinese, the anaemic babes of Austria, for Christ's sake, should be on his heart, and have his advocacy in their extreme need. This would indeed be a witnessing miracle in the eyes of the world.

It may be that this high ideal of Christlike service will never be fully realized in any of our churches; and yet it will ever be before us as the glorious goal toward which a church of Christ's redeemed ones in grateful love will press. "Even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

But beyond even this, reach the possibilities of the Deacon's office, for in paragraph 47 we read further:

(2) "It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the Church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these among the objects to which they are contributed."

In these words is found the real advance beyond the former language of our Form of Government. They declare that the duties of the Deacon do not end with receiving and distributing occasional collections for a few needy ones. They are more also than the formal taking of collections at Sunday services, with strategic plans against the escape of any liable soul, ending in the stately march down the main aisle. Better and higher than this, he becomes an apostle of benevolence. Initiation of good works; thought for the spiritual development of the congregation in the grace of giving; wise, orderly and efficient methods for providing funds necessary to all the causes of the Church; fidelity and warm-hearted sympathy in distributing such devoted trust funds are holy duties, which may well command the hand and heart of the noblest Christian men.

The measure of the influence of the Church upon the community will be, to a large extent, the degree of the vision and power of its dea-

cons. The Church is concerned about the honest and consistent meeting of all of its financial obligations, and this rests upon his wisdom and fidelity. The gifts of its members are made in large proportion for Foreign Missions; so he must know the spiritual needs of the world, and have deep interest in the world-wide missionary enterprises of his own church. He should also realize the Home Mission crises of his own land, with enthusiasm for every campaign to save the homeland. He is the guardian of every temporal interest of the home church, and should be an enthusiastic propagandist of the most effective means of world-evangelization. The gifts and graces of seer, statesman and philanthropist may well be his. We have been underestimating through all the years the wideness and richness of the Deacon's part in the Gospel plan.

(3) "They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation."

The reading of these words in many of our smaller churches might provoke a fleeting smile, since such ministrations of loving care are often tacitly assigned to another group of members, our devoted and untiring women. But while the Deacons may wisely associate with themselves committees of women, in order to insure order and beauty in the House

of God, and to make His courts lovely and desirable, yet the responsibility and leadership in these matters are now laid upon the Deacons. Well-kept church property and an attractive and comfortable house of worship will bear witness in the community to reverence for God and love of His House. A neglected church property judges and condemns its members. Too many neglected sanctuaries have been standing reproaches to our Christian professions. In order that it may be so no longer, this duty also is now laid on the great heart of the Deacon.

(4) "In matters of special importance affecting the property of the Church, they cannot take final action without the consent of the congregation."

Officers of our churches are representatives of the members, chosen by them to exercise the rights and duties of the members in an orderly and efficient manner. But property rights and authority still remain vested primarily in the membership. Its agents, the Deacons, cannot act presumptuously nor dictatorially in the performance of their trust. They will not, for example, undertake extensive repairs, make radical changes, nor alienate any holdings, without consulting the congregation. This general principle of representative and brotherly government, characteristic of both Church and State in America, will not be transgressed by worthy, conscientious officers.

(5) "In the discharge of their duties, the Deacons are under the general supervision and authority of the Session."

The Presbyterian Church is not a divided, or two-headed body, but a compact and orderly unit. There is one head as in the physical body, directing the other members, such as arms, hands and feet. This ruling and directing head is the Session, to which is committed oversight of all the life and activities of the Church. To this body the Board of Deacons must be loyally and harmoniously related, a relation specified in a more detailed way in a following paragraph (paragraph 49 of this section). A judicious Session will not unduly cramp the activities of the Board of Deacons, one of the vital members of the Body of Christ. The Deacons will not disregard the authority and counsel of the Elders, who are the ruling and unifying officers in the Church.

(6) "In a church in which it is impossible for any reason to secure Deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the Ruling Elders."

The most frequent cause of this impossibility is evidently the lack of a sufficient number of pious and qualified men in a local church to fill the offices of both Elder and Deacon. While the work of the church calls for diversity of gifts in its members, when possible, the unavoidable lack of such diversi-

fication must not check its activities. The functions of the Deacon were original and inherent in the Elder. In the record of the institution of the office of the Deacon (Acts vi) we read that the new office proceeded out of the older under pressure of an emergency; and was included as part of the original service of the Elders. It was the Apostles themselves who set the Seven "over this business," which they themselves had conducted hitherto. Herein lies the logic of this provision of our new law. It is fortunate that difficulties may not deprive the Church of such needed service. Wise diversification into two offices naturally returns, under necessity, to unification into the original office.

So ends paragraph 47. The wise and clear statement of the duties of the Deacon in this paragraph is occasion for sincere gratification. Our Church owes a debt of gratitude to the prudent, able men, who with conservative but far-seeing mind, have written a satisfying and enduring statement of Scriptural and practical legislation. Its sanity, and its harmony with Scripture plan and purpose will commend it to this and coming generations. They and our Church have obeyed through it the Lord's command: "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

CHAPTER V.

The Deacon Himself

"To the office of Deacon, which is spiritual in nature, should be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment."—*Form of Government, Chap. IV, Sect. IV, Parag. 48.*

Having considered the importance and duties of this office, finding that in its enlarged field it is now a renewed, but not a new, office in the Church; that it has been lifted from disparagement and partial disuse into special honor and large opportunity; that while *many* churches hitherto have magnified the office, henceforth *all* are to magnify it, and use it to attain glorious ends, this paragraph brings us to the heart of the discussion. **The key to the situation is the man himself.** The assurance of the success of the office is the peculiar fitness of the man for his high office. That fitness, in general, is the quality which fits all officers in the Church for their several offices, and every individual member to serve Christ in his part and place. That fundamental characteristic is spirituality; men of the Spirit for an office which takes the temporal and external service of the Church, and translates it into spiritual service.

So much has been said on this subject in a preceding chapter (Chapter III) that little more is necessary here. We must rid ourselves of the notion that the Deacon is somewhat of a secular personage in the Church, preferably an able man of affairs, not sufficiently spiritual to be an Elder, and yet too useful not to be used in some lower and unspiritual service. A modern Gibeonite to hew wood and draw water! Our Presbyterian Nethinim, neither priest nor Levite, far from the ministry, and not quite an Elder!

The well-chosen words of this paragraph, and Paul's description of the true Deacon in his letter to Timothy dispel such an unworthy view. The Deacon should be consecrated to his Lord for his special service; he must live the life of prayer, even as must the Minister and the Elder. The difference in offices is not difference in presence and power of the Spirit, but in differing gifts for different services, all of which are spiritual and holy. "We who are many are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another, and having gifts differing according to the grace given unto us, whether *deaconing*, let us give ourselves to our *deaconing*, or he that ruleth, with diligence." Of all offices, it is the one most necessarily to be committed to spirit-filled men, for the very reason that it has to do with material things and duties, which must

be transformed into means of spiritual service.

To this other qualifications are added, emphasizing uprightness, enthusiasm for the Gospel, and the warmth of a true Christian sympathy. Such qualities are the same in essence as those required in the words of institution in Acts vi: "men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." The Deacon's life and character are a large part of the fulfillment of his office. A pure life, a great faith, a liberal heart, a flaming zeal are the qualities which rise to the ideal of the True Deacon.

CHAPTER VI.

The Organization of the Office

"The Deacons of a particular church shall be organized as a Board, of which the pastor shall be an advisory member. The Board shall elect a Chairman, a Secretary and a Treasurer, to whom shall be entrusted the funds for the current expenses of the Church. It shall meet at least once a quarter, and whenever requested by the Session. The Board of each church shall determine the number necessary for a quorum," etc.—*Form of Government, Sect. IV, Parag. 49*

This new paragraph provides for uniformity throughout the Church in organization of the Deacons in their various churches, and for orderliness in conducting the affairs of the office. Three items are considered: organization, keeping of records, and joint conferences with the Session.

(1) Organization. A brief plan is offered for forming the Deacons of a local church into a Board.

The officers to be elected are those of any ordinary and well regulated board: Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer or Treasurers. Frequently in the practice of churches with large membership one Treasurer receives and disburses the gifts of the people for local church support, another Treasurer receives and disburses the gifts for benevolences.

The Board is required to meet at least once a quarter. Ordinarily its meetings are held monthly. It must also meet whenever required by the Session.

As conditions vary so widely in different churches, the number necessary to constitute a quorum is left to the decision of the Board of each church.

A happy addition in the new plan of organization is the inclusion of the Pastor of the church as an advisory member. It is to him that the Board must turn, as its chief source of information and inspiration for its activities.

(2) The Records. It is required that record shall be made and kept of all proceedings and of the handling of all funds. Such records *must* be submitted to the Session every six months, or at any time upon its request. The increasing activities and enlarging liberalities of the Church make imperative that careful and orderly account of all funds be kept and given. Consecrated business men, as in their worldly business so also in the business of the Lord, must have zeal for cleanness and exactness of record. The indispensable man at this point is the faithful and accurate treasurer. Here on earth his praise is scant and his tribulations many; but great will be his reward in Heaven.

(3) Joint Meetings. No well-organized and clear-visioned church attempts to con-

duct its affairs without proper correlation of all its agencies. The stated, or at least the occasional, joint meeting of the Session and Board of Deacons may now be taken for granted as necessary for mutual benefit in spiritual matters, and for the wise ordering of their separate functions, as well as the duties common to both. It is suggested that such joint meetings be held quarterly. They may be held merely for informal conference; or by unofficial presence of the Elders at a meeting of the Board of Deacons; or with the unofficial presence of the Deacons at a meeting of the Session; proper record being kept by the body in regular session. Best of all, a regular, official quarterly joint meeting may be regarded as a part of the duties of both bodies.

CHAPTER VII.

The Deacon in Relation to the Church at Large

"Deacons may properly be appointed by the Higher Courts to serve on committees, especially as Treasurers, when such committees have to deal with raising and disbursing funds. It is suitable also that they be appointed Trustees of any funds held by any of the Church Courts. It may also be helpful for the Church Courts, when devising plans of church finance, to invite wise and consecrated Deacons to their counsels."—*Form of Government, Sect. IV, Parag. 50.*

In this paragraph it is contemplated that this office now so widened and dignified may henceforth be used in the larger and more general activities of the Church. Finding men of the Barnabas spirit and stature, the Church proposes to use them in its great enterprises. Many great-hearted and large-minded men of affairs have been serving in the office of Deacon. Let us expect that the new emphasis put upon the office will be a call to them to consecrate their talents in yet wider spheres to the cause of the Gospel, in this official way, as many are now doing through laymen's organizations and in other groups of Christian men.

Often there is need for such men in the counsels and financial work of Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly. This paragraph authorizes their appointment by the

Higher Courts as members of their committees, when they are concerned with matters falling within the sphere of the Deacon's service. This may have been done heretofore in isolated and informal cases. It now becomes a matter of regular procedure, and offers another challenge to our strong men to devote themselves to service for Christ in channels where their talents may flow so well and strong.

CHAPTER VIII.

Conferences of Deacons

"The Deacons may, with much advantage, hold conferences from time to time for the discussion of the interests committed to them. Such conferences may include churches representing areas of smaller or larger extent. Any actions taken by these conferences shall have only an advisory character."—*Form of Government, Sect. IV, Parag. 51.*

Ministers and Ruling Elders of our churches in both limited and extended areas, render valuable assistance to each other by frequent meetings, in Church Courts, where common difficulties are considered, provision made for overcoming them, and individual experiences made profitable for all. These Courts of the Church meet regularly, and have legislative and administrative authority. Such is not possible, of course, for the Deacons, whose relations are sustained solely to the local church.

But under this paragraph provision is made for conferences for discussion, counsel and inspiration in matters of common concern, although no such conference may have more than advisory character. Such conferences of Deacons have in reality been held time and again in the past years. But such meetings have been too seldom. Our Boards of Deacons throughout the Church will do well to heed this recommendation of

our Form of Government, and help bear one another's burdens through the sympathy and wider information of such meetings. The issues which occupy the counsels of a laymen's convention are no larger than those which call for a Deacons' Conference. And the mutual gain will be as great for the latter as for the former.

CHAPTER IX.

Election and Tenure of Office

Deacons are to be elected by the particular congregation which they are to serve, in the same manner in which Elders are elected, directions for which have been carefully outlined in the Form of Government of our Church. They are to be ordained to and installed in their office with an appropriate and impressive public service and the laying on of the hands of the Session.—*Form of Government, Chapter VI, Sections III and IV.*

Deacons who have served in other churches, and after dismission to another church have been elected as Deacons in this church, are not again ordained, but only installed into office the second time. Removal by letter to another church automatically discontinues the actual discharge of the duties of the office; for no officer can serve in a congregation except by the election of that congregation. The ordination to the office of Deacon may not be repeated, as the office is perpetual. The words of the Form of Government are: "The offices of Ruling Elder and Deacon are perpetual; nor can they be laid aside at pleasure; nor can any person be degraded from their office but by deposition after regular trial."

Suitable provision has been made for divesting a Deacon of his office, without censure, when he is unable to discharge the

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duties of the office because of his being unacceptable to the congregation in which he holds office. (Book of Discipline, Chapter VIII, Section X.)

It sometimes happens that one elected to this office proves unfit for its duties, or unable to perform them with acceptance to the congregation. In such a case, where no blame or wrong attaches to himself, the following provision is made for divesting him of the office without censure:

"A minister of the Gospel against whom there are no charges, if fully satisfied in his own conscience that God has not called him to the ministry, or if he has satisfactory evidence of his inability to serve the Church with acceptance, may report these facts at a stated meeting. At the next stated meeting, if after full deliberation the Presbytery shall concur with him in judgment, it may divest him of his office without censure, and shall assign him membership in some particular church. This provision shall in like manner apply *mutatis mutandis* to the case of Ruling Elders and Deacons; but in all such cases the Session of the church to which the Elder or Deacon belongs shall act as the Presbytery acts in similar cases where a Minister is concerned." (Book of Discipline, Chapter XII, Section III.)

In recent years overtures have been made to the General Assembly for the adoption

of a rotation in office for Elders and Deacons. In each case the overtures have been answered in the negative, for the conception of these offices by our Church is that they are not temporary nor occasional, but perpetual. The call to them is in reality from God and ordination is in His name and by His Spirit. Circumstances may interrupt the discharge of the duties of the office, but the ordination may not be arbitrarily dissolved and the call of God to office be recalled at will by man. This high conception of the Office of the Deacon affirms, therefore, that it is "perpetual," and may not "be laid aside at pleasure."

CHAPTER X.

Co-operation of Godly Women

"It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly women of the congregation to assist the Deacons in ministering to the sick, to widows, to orphans, to prisoners, and to others who may be in any distress or need. They may also aid the Deacons in collecting and distributing the offerings of the people."—*Form of Government, Section IV, Parag. 51a.*

This paragraph must not be taken as instituting an order of Deaconesses. As a matter of fact, many of the duties assigned to the Deacon under the revised chapter have been performed in an informal way all the while by the devoted women of the Church. Care for the cleanliness and beauty of the House of God has often fallen to their charge. They have rendered invaluable assistance in canvassing for funds. The poor, the sick and the stranger rejoice in the comfort of their ministrations. Their zeal and hard work account for the raising of large funds for church repairs and for mission purposes. As pastor's aids, in missionary and aid society, always with the same tact and talent, cheer and comfort as in the home, so also in the Church they have been able allies of the Deacons. The Session and Deacons are not to forget "those women, who labored in the

Lord." Many a pastor and church today enters into the spirit of Paul, when he wrote to those at Rome: "I commend to you, Phoebe, the deaconess of the church at Cenchraea . . . who has been a succourer of many, and of me also."

In fitting and grateful recognition of this blessed service, the closing paragraph of the new law suggests to Sessions the wisdom of continuing this ministration of women, now in a constitutional way. As she ministered to Christ Himself, so there are occasions and needs in our times, when her presence can comfort and her hands bind up the broken of heart.

Conclusion

Throughout its sections and paragraphs the new chapter on the Deacon, in our Form of Government, calls the Church to more loyal obedience to Christ's command for the evangelization of the world. It lays plans for the organization, toward that glorious end, of the membership and resources of the whole Church. The choice and appointment of such men, as the Chapter contemplates, to the Scriptural office of the Deacon will be a great advance in that direction. The Church stands ready to follow the lead of good men, full of the Holy Spirit.

This presentation of the Office of the Deacon could not be brought to its conclusion in a more appropriate manner than with the use of the explanatory statement with which the General Assembly's Ad-Interim Committee closed its report to the Assembly of 1921:

"Our Church, in common with all the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, discovers the origin of the office of Deacon in the election of the Seven, of which Luke tells us in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Upon this narrative we are almost wholly dependent for an understanding of the nature and duties of the Diaconate. A study of the setting and the details of this narrative seems to yield the conception of the office presented in this report. The early Christian community, as Luke describes it, exhibited a conscious

unity, a warm sympathy among its members, a fellowship of love and a generous relief of each other's needs. They "were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." The word that expresses all this is "koinonia," translated in our version fellowship or communion, and representing one of the great ideas of the New Testament.

This "koinonia," or "communion," was effected by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and constituted the Christians a new and distinct community. As is set forth in Chapter XXVI, of our Confession on the Communion of Saints, one way in which this communion of saints manifests itself is "in relieving each other in outward things." This was true of these primitive Christians in Jerusalem, and to the same effect is the teaching of Paul when writing to the Romans and Corinthians about the great collection for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem in which he busied himself on his third missionary journey (Romans xv, 25-28; 1 Cor. xvi, 1-4; 2 Cor., chapters viii and ix). Paul calls this collection "koinonia" (Romans xv, 26). It was to him a mark and proof of the Christian fellowship which united Jew and Gentile and transcended all differences of race and culture. This was the reason for Paul's intense interest in the collection and his earnest desire that it should be acceptable

to the saints in Jerusalem. The Deacon makes his appearance when the Christian community is translating its fellowship into practical form and becomes the organ of this fellowship. It seems a fair inference that the fundamental idea of the Diaconate is that it represents the communion of saints. This does not mean that it is the exclusive representative, nor need it mean that the range of its representation activities is limited to meeting the special need which led to the creation of the office. The specific activity recorded in the Acts is but an illustration of a principle capable of development and application in many ways.

Luke's picture of the Church of the early days paints a community instinct with the mind of Christ. He had an intense sympathy with men in their manifold sorrows and distresses, and He carried on a vast work of relief. He was the great servant of humanity. "I am among you," says He, "as he that serveth." The individual Christian and the Christian community are to perpetuate and imitate His sympathy and service. This was characteristic of the primitive Christians, and the Deacon was appointed to be their heart and hand in sympathetic service. The very name of Deacon summons him to this; it means "servant;" and links him with the Son of Man who "came not to be served, but to serve." The Deacon's office, then, represents the compassionate spirit, and the beneficent work of the Church."